

Intelligence in Public Media

African Intelligence Services: Early Postcolonial and Contemporary Challenges

Ryan Shaffer, ed. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 294 pages, introduction, map, chart, index.

Reviewed by Charles Long

The study of African intelligence services is arguably one of the less explored and more narrowly appreciated fields of research. Compared to Western and Eastern intelligence services, the African services are much younger and even more insular, resulting in far less reputable information about them in the public domain. The histories and accomplishments of African services are nevertheless just as fascinating and worthy of global attention as those of any other region or nation.

Historian Ryan Shaffer contributes to such awareness by assembling the research of 13 authors into a well-documented examination of the intelligence services of a dozen African countries—the first such deep dive known to this reviewer. His objective is to survey select African services, with appropriate attention to each country’s circumstances during their early post-colonial histories. This anthology is presented chronologically to depict the evolutions and frameworks of the services. The authors also recap the histories of the countries as they recount their services’ evolutions.

Readers can only appreciate the authors’ exceptional research. African services operate with high levels of secrecy and few legal or political precedents for declassification or public discussion of intelligence matters. Outside of South Africa, the scarcity of declassified information or credible open-source information on the activities of African services hinders research. The authors persevered and pieced together relatively clear pictures of their subjects from the archives of non-African services that operated in Africa; rare peeks into government archives; academic books; and even defector interviews. The authors present inviting lists of sources in their notes that encourage readers to continue similar research and can result in hours of incidental reading.

Shaffer sets the tone for the book with a useful chronology of Kenya’s Special Branch, whose structure and activities were established by Britain, there

as in so many colonies. He develops the history of the Kenyan services that he explored initially in a *Studies in Intelligence* article.^a He explains the under-preparedness of the Special Branch at the start of the Mau Mau movement, its brutal excesses, and its eventual restructuring. At independence from Britain, the onetime targets of the Special Branch rose to become the new political leaders it then served. The new Kenyan leaders did not overhaul the security services, but instead turned the tables and directed them to focus on the new political opposition.

Simon Graham examines the Cold War competition between the two Germanys in Zanzibar and Tanganyika, which Tanzanian postcolonial leaders exploited to advance their respective interests and support their security apparatuses. Readers learn how West German intelligence cooperation on the Tanganyika mainland did not gain as much traction as the East Germans on Zanzibar Island, and how the Tanzanians made similar overtures to the Soviet Union and to China, with the latter emerging as Tanzania’s dominant foreign security partner. Later in the book Christopher Bailey takes a regional look at the prospects for the intelligence structures of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, within the contexts of their legal frameworks and their individual security conditions.

Owen Sirrs examines Mozambique and Angola, where Cold War struggles shaped the intelligence services. The sweeping power and brutality of the colonial Portuguese service in both countries forced the nationalist movements to go underground and adopt harsh tactics. The movements gravitated toward the troika of Soviet, Cuban, and East German intelligence services, which left indelible marks on their security apparatuses with resources, organizational structures, and operational guidance. This Marxist legacy shaped the modern-day services and instilled an enduring “culture of fear” of security services in both countries.

a. Ryan Shaffer, “Following in Footsteps: The Transformation of Kenya’s Intelligence Services Since the Colonial Era,” *Studies in Intelligence—Extracts* 63, no. 1, (March 2019).

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John Burton Kegel maps out the role of the Rwandan security services in factors and events that led to the genocide. He also reveals the debilitating effects of regionalism on intelligence services and on governance in general. In Rwanda, these had tragic consequences. Benjamin Spatz and Alex Bollfrass use vivid examples in Liberia to illustrate another reality: the tendency of leaders to misuse intelligence services led by loyalists to preserve their regimes. The authors explain the unique relationship between the United States and Liberia, but their characterization that Liberia was US intelligence's bastion in Africa may be a misunderstanding of Liberia's strategic importance during the Cold War. (151) Tshepo Gwatiwa and Lesego Tsholofelo describe Botswana's particular political and security structures and their effects on the intelligence service. These authors offer introspective and honest views of Botswanan intelligence and of its relationship with the executive leadership, and they highlight the work ahead for intelligence reform.

In Glenn Cross's thoroughly researched examination of the role of intelligence in the Rhodesian Bush War, readers learn the limitations of the Central Intelligence Organisation in the counterinsurgency, despite its operational successes in penetrating the nationalist movements. Students of Cold War intelligence would probably welcome details to support the contention that Western intelligence services provided Rhodesian intelligence with nearly all its information on Chinese and Eastern Bloc support to the insurgent groups. (110) As Cross points out, after Zimbabwe gained independence, this accomplished service was principally directed to keep Robert Mugabe in power.

Joseph Fitsanakis and Shannon Brophy's study of Sudanese intelligence guides the readers through the rich history of the services and the sources of their outside influences. Sudan watchers might, however, disagree that Gen. Omar al-Bashir's 1999 sidelining of Islamist leader Hassan al-Turabi ended the 10-year Islamization of the government and the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS). (177) Such a deep philosophical change

of course in a security apparatus may take a generation or more to achieve.

Kevin O'Brien gives an authoritative history of intelligence in South Africa, which he compellingly observes has been at the heart of every major event in the country and somehow tied to nearly all political players. He offers a fascinating look at the intelligence capabilities of the African National Congress (ANC) during the struggle, juxtaposed with a similarly thorough view of the civilian and military intelligence services of the apartheid government. The intelligence front of the struggle culminated in the pro-apartheid National Intelligence Service working with their ANC counterparts to achieve a negotiated settlement for the transition to democratic majority rule. O'Brien also presents the emergence of politicization of and corruption in the South African intelligence apparatus, which has undercut confidence in this vital state institution.

Ibikunle Adeakin analyzes how the Nigerian military and civilian intelligence services, operating under statutes enacted under former military rule, are effectively unburdened by civilian oversight and have avoided institutional reform. These conditions have given the less effective security service chiefs unregulated autonomy and have permitted their services to often violate the public trust.

Readers' only major disappointment may be that analyses of some intelligence services of former French colonies in Africa are absent from this book, although the reviewer understands that this may be the eventual subject of another study by Shaffer. *African Intelligence Services* might seem aimed at the specialist, but this anthology is valuable for anyone seeking to understanding Africa's broader security issues. By the end of this century, Africa is projected to be the only continent experiencing population growth and home to 13 of the world's 20 biggest urban areas. African governments will experience unimaginable pressures and changes, and their intelligence services will have to adapt.



The reviewer: Charles Long is the pen name of a retired CIA operations officer who served in Africa.